



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Christine Lidbury, 608-266-2219
christine.lidbury@wi.gov

Women's Council Commends Assembly on Passage of Important Legislation to Protect Victims of Human Trafficking

Madison, WI (February 19, 2014) The Women's Council commends the Wisconsin State Assembly for passage of Assembly Bill 620, to strengthen laws to protect human trafficking victims, as a step in the right direction to protect children and adults from victimization and provide our state with additional tools to prosecute these crimes.

Assembly Bill 620 was authored by Representative Amy Loudenberg (R-Clinton) with the assistance of Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen. Senator Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon) is the author the Senate companion bill, SB492, which is currently available for scheduling before the full Senate.

"Human trafficking and other sensitive crimes are a threat to children and adults in Wisconsin and this legislation is needed to continue Wisconsin's fight against these crimes. Assembly Bill 620 strengthens our laws to protect victims of human trafficking as well as provides additional tools to prosecute these crimes," said Representative Loudenberg.

In 2013, the FBI rescued 10 children and arrested 100 suspected traffickers in Wisconsin as part of a nationwide investigation – among the highest total out of all the states in the nation. In 2012, the FBI rescued six children and arrested 60 suspects in a similar operation.

"Human trafficking is a fast growing criminal industry across the globe and Wisconsin is no exception. While Wisconsin is moving in the right direction to eradicate human trafficking, there is still a lot of work to do. We must protect our most vulnerable citizens," said Senator Petrowski.

The Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Justice Assistance, reports that trafficking has been found in more than half of all Wisconsin counties – in both rural and urban counties. Since 2000, about 1-in-6 encountered victims were minors and 75% of encountered victims were from sex-related trafficking crimes. Nationally, the average age of a new child prostitute is 13.

continued

"Trafficking victims are often forced to engage in prostitution and other criminal activity. A resulting criminal record undermines the ability of these victims to move forward with their lives and become productive members of our communities," said Mary Jo Baas, Women's Council Chair. "Wisconsin is moving in the right direction in joining more than a dozen other states in seeking to provide recourse for the courts to expunge convictions for prostitution-related offenses that victims of human trafficking are forced to commit."

Key changes to current law contained in AB620 and SB492 include:

- Providing a unified process to incorporate the forfeiture of property into a human trafficking case
- Eliminating non-consent as part of the definition of "trafficking"
- Limiting the ability to prosecute minors engaged in prostitution
- Allowing a victim of human trafficking to have a prostitution conviction vacated or expunged
- Allowing evidence of any similar acts by the accused to be admitted in court for pending trafficking and child sex crimes

Additional information about Assembly Bill 620 is available at:
<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2013/proposals/ab620>

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL

The Women's Council is Wisconsin's statutory commission on the status of women and girls. Established in 1983, the Council promotes initiatives that empower women, serves as a clearing-house for information for and about women, and promotes unique partnerships to address issues affecting Wisconsin women. The Council is governed by a 15-member Board appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders.

###